

AN ESSAY

ON

Ruerperial Convulsions

by

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of

Virginia

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8<sup>th</sup> L. Walnut

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## Puerperal Convulsions.

The selection of this disease as the subject of my Thesis was not made with the expectation of advancing anything new but solely with the view of investigating it as well as my opportunities would permit with the earnest hope that I might be enabled to form an opinion as to its Pathology, Nature and Treatment. I have been further influenced in this selection as Puerperal convulsions are one of those subjects upon which the medical world has been long divided, and the study of which is for the most part calculated to obscure the ideas of the student and to fill his mind with unpleasant anticipations, when about to enter upon the duties of his profession. We have on this subject but little more than theory, and the theories which have been advanced are of such a different nature and require such different treatment, that instead of forming a correct opinion, we are likely, when we think we are about to reach a safe anchorage, to be buffeted and driven back until we are enveloped in the thick



met of the surrounding waves, and are almost ready to despair of arriving at the wished for port. This is strongly exemplified in consulting the different authors who have written on this disease, for one, considering it is arising from bodily and extreme sensibility of the Nervous fibres another from over distension of the Nerves and another from a Morbid state of the system in general, and, each one having his own treatment. Look, what is in itself better calculated than such doubt and speculation to bewilder and confound the student? It is indeed discouraging to him, let me not however be understood as saying that the path is altogether blind; for he it from me although there has been since the first dawn of Medicine so great a contrariety of opinion on this subject, and although the sun of genius has shone but with a faint light upon it, some have been able in very many instances to bring to a favourable termination this, one of the most alarming diseases to which all those who "Love their Lord"



are liable.

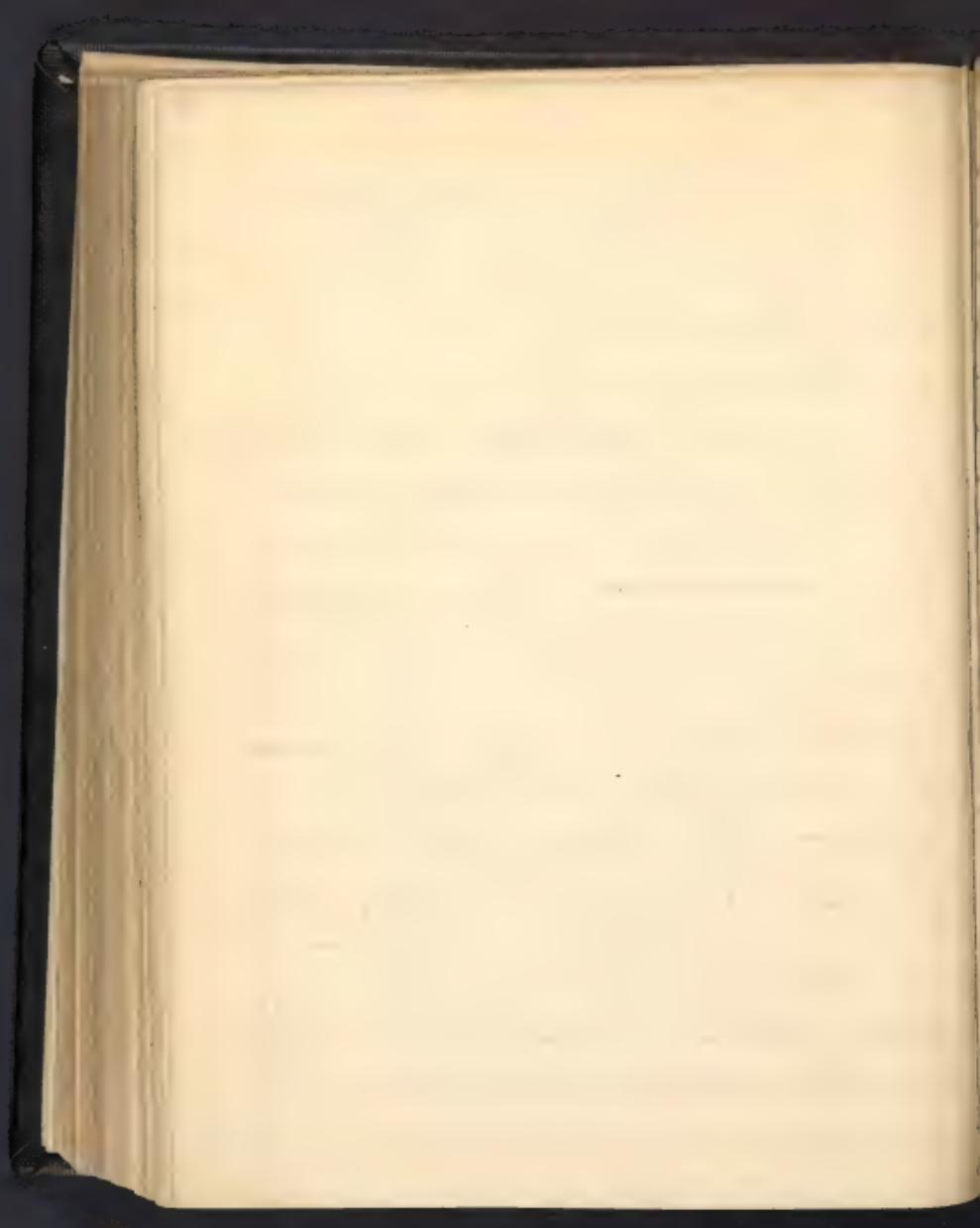
Convulsions may take place at any period of gestation, but they occur most frequently between the Sixth and Ninth months; they may also take place after delivery, but this is rare. They are preceded by Headache, Tumid Anus, Dull, suffused eyes, Indistinct vision, Flash of fire in the eyes, and a number of symptoms which warn us of the approach of something serious. They are of three kinds, Epileptic, Hysterick and Apoplectic. Burn is of opinion that the Epileptic occur fifty times where the others occur once. Park asserts that the Epileptic far outnumber more of the Apoplectic than Hysterick species, and I am inclined to think from his pathological view of the subject, that it is his belief that the Apoplectic are more frequently met with than is generally suspected. He says, that as pregnancy advances the greater uterus' sensibility declines, and after parturition most by degrees, and the womb at the same time increasing in size, press the Intestines into a much smal-



la space there is natural to them, and consequently that  
the Aorta and other large vessels are compressed and de-  
terioration to the head is produced; she, moreover, says  
that in conjunction with this, the violent and often un-  
perceived efforts of the women drive the blood with  
such force upon the brain, that rupture of vessels,  
extravasation and Apoplexy follow each other in quick  
succession. McHamilton view on the other hand would  
lead us to believe, that the uterus retained its sensibility un-  
till the latest period of pregnancy, and accordingly he says  
that convulsions may arise either from extreme sensibili-  
ty in the Cervix and Ov. Uteri, or from over distention  
of the uterus itself. Baas admits the former of Hamil-  
ton's opinions to be probably a cause of Epileptic con-  
vulsions, but denies indirectly that the latter exists at  
all as a cause. Baudelocque says that those which  
arise during labour may be owing to extreme sen-  
sibility of the uterine fibres, violent distention of  
the cervix and Ov. Uteri, and of those parts which form



The entrance of the Putendum. Impulse of the Heart  
 is in a rarefaction of the blood and consequent ag-  
 gmentation of it, or vice in consequence of the heat  
 excited by the continue effort of the woman then  
 in effect. But though may in its force be  
 weak, the latter are most I think to be acknowledged to  
 be violent, for it has been sedispositively ascertained  
 and we have Dr. B. before note for it) that blood is  
 not in approachable fluids. Dr. Gunn says that the  
 disease comes mostly in cities and among the higher  
 ranks of life, and that it is produced in either  
 by the wantonness or, or by change affected in  
 the constitutions by the manner of living this and  
 by Dr. G. does not in the first, but that he has seen  
 so many cases of not more in the country and in  
 the humbler ranks of life than in any other other  
 place. With due reference to Dr. Gunn's opinion, I must say  
 I may be allowed an opinion that there always  
 been and are still forwarded that Dr. Gunn



land, and I think I have given you for my opinion,  
for in the part of the country in which I live there  
is but little cattle raising, living, & breeding, and the  
people are for the most part compelled to ride a  
temperate and active life, and I have never during  
my recollection known more than two cases of this  
particular disease, and both of those were men who  
lived luxuriously, and exercised but little. There  
are various other opinions on the subject but in those  
I have stated but it is unnecessary, for we have  
made them all. Whether they are, however, all  
the cause and injuries so to the prostrate  
cause of the disease, is a still somewhat obscure;  
enough however is known to meet the cautious  
but to a happy termination of it in many cases,  
and just enough to inspire the mind with  
a sense of particular interest, and is a fit subject  
for meeting in the bosom of the young & intelligent  
a valuable spirit of emulation, which alone can



promise to have that distinction in his favor which is so desirable.

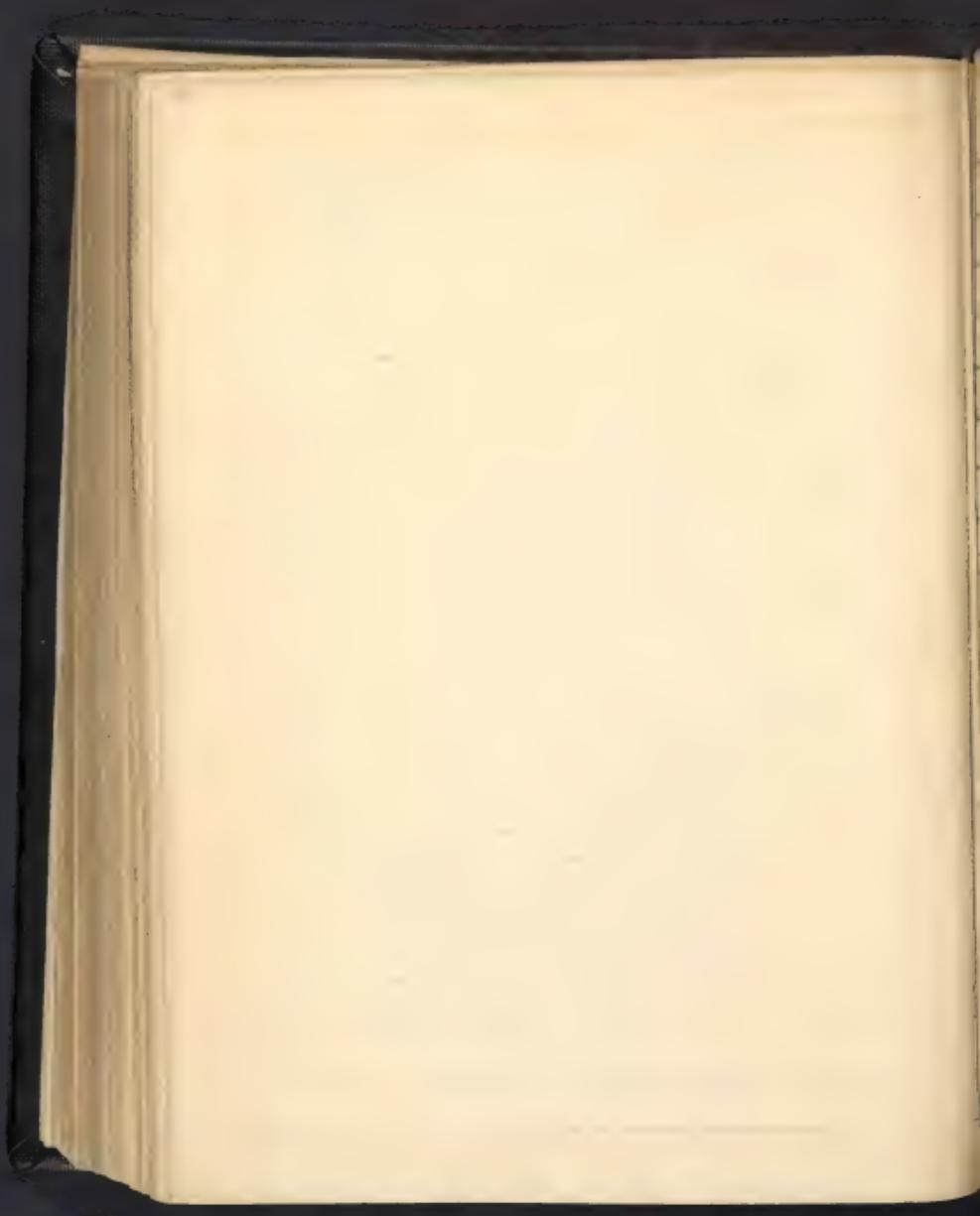
It is however, a desirable object to the Physician to be able to distinguish the exact nature or species of Convulsions, for the different Species require such different treatment, at least the Spasmodic) and I think that the simplest division of them into Epileptic, Spasmodic and Aseptic and the concordance with the symptoms of each have been established by some authors are both proper and useful. The Epileptic Species is however very rare indeed, a disease, nearly to be the most frequent on which is nearly free from diversity of name. Hence having in the one I speak in no case, found out what a sort of E. I. was or was proper in Spasmodic Convulsions, particularly to introduce this name and the Epileptic, and at present have the several, naming for the different exposed to the view in order. The first is the



all lengths of time, and it is seen that the shot  
at this time is the more violent and dangerous  
will be the convulsions. The woman is sometimes  
creased very suddenly, and without any of those  
premonitory symptoms; whilst in others in her a  
short interval, she will soon succumb and most  
violently convulse. The combination of all  
these marks the other most propitious for the decom-  
pence of the young practitioner. In the majori-  
ty of instances, however, we have a prelude to the tragic  
scene and that not a little unpleasant. After the  
above mentioned symptoms have continued while  
the whole body becomes convulsed, the muscles of  
the face move particularly, the eye move with  
inconceivable difficulty, and the mouth convulsions  
assume a most frightful aspect. as tongue is  
twisted sideways the teeth, a bloody froth issues from  
the mouth, and there is a hysteric noise which  
is peculiar to this species. The pulse is at first

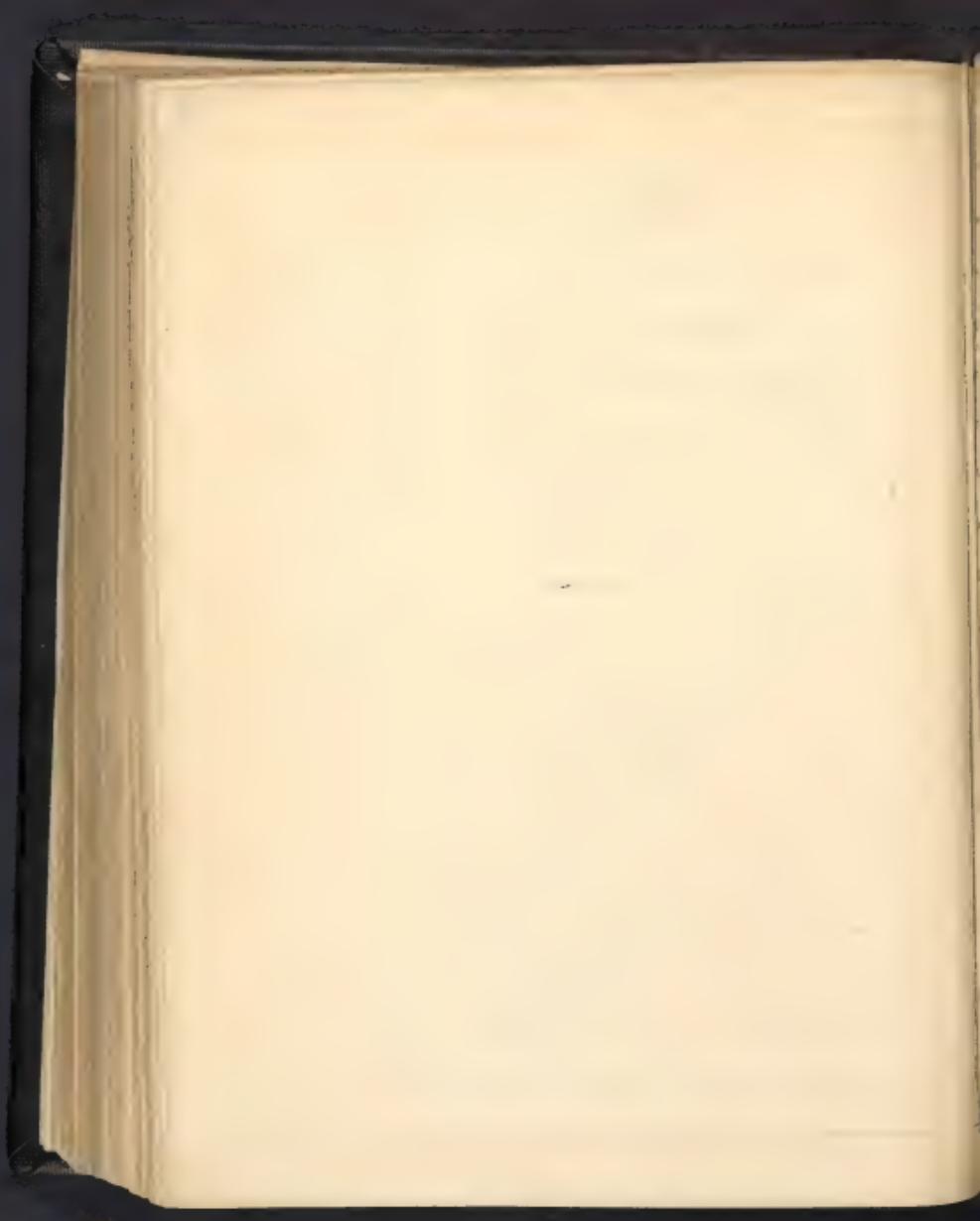


either into strongly excited, but it then becomes  
 quiet, small and small, so that the perspiration  
 can scarcely be felt; who sweating is at first dif-  
 ficult and oppressive, but after a time becomes  
 more easy. The urine and faeces are sometimes  
 discharged, and the body is covered with a cold, com-  
 mon sweat; these usually subsiding, the woman  
 remains in a languid state, and cannot be ex-  
 ercised, and when she does come to her  
 senses, she has either no recollection of a recol-  
 lection at all of what has passed, and there is  
 a general want of the faculty, or no recollection  
 however of but short duration, for the effects are  
 usually gone and recurred again if she is not re-  
 lieved and thus usually with all the symp-  
 toms of labour pains, my advice is always  
 to employ a warm or warmish cloth, it is not  
 known whether they are common, and the  
 child it is usually born during one of these cold



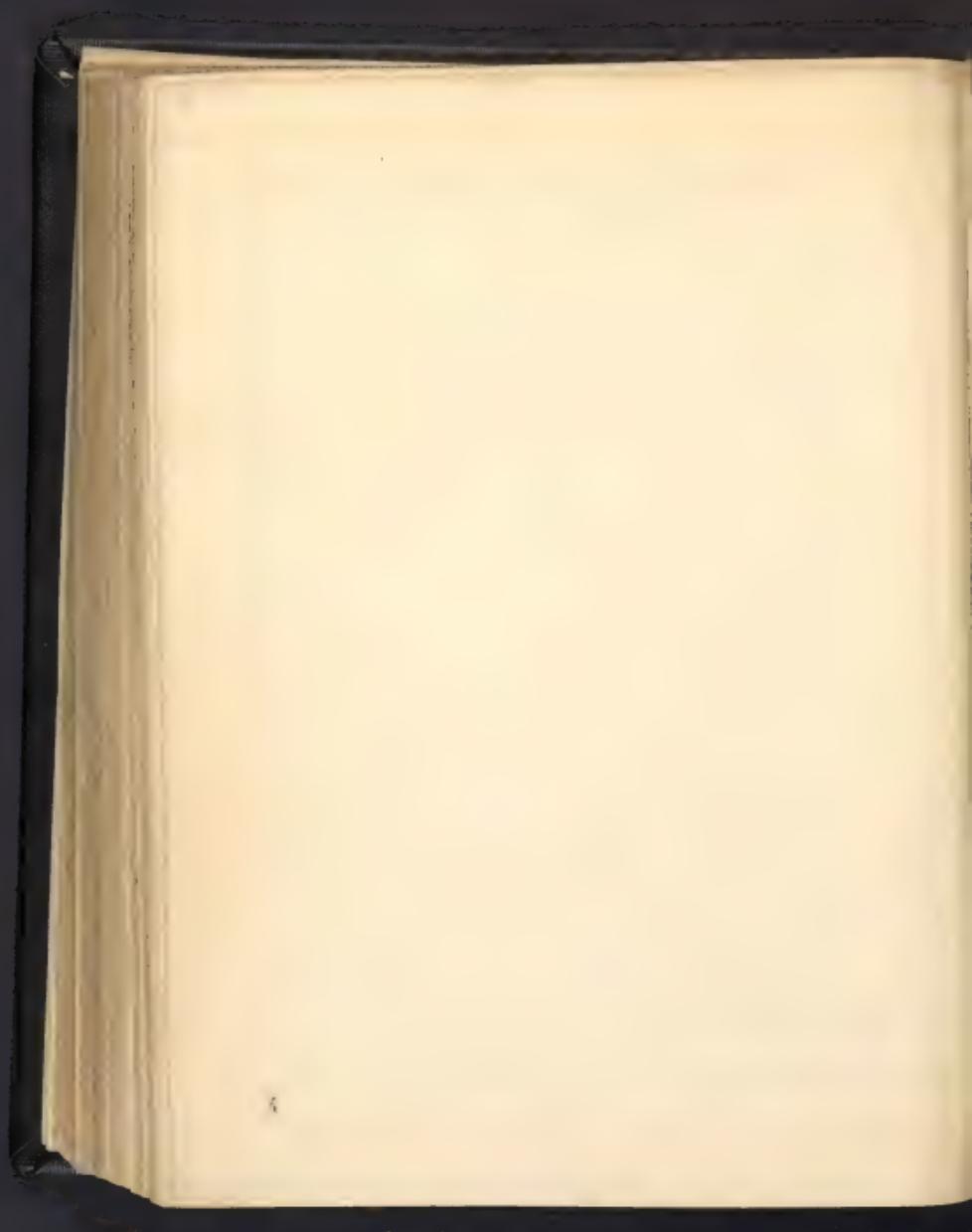
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it would seem from a case mentioned by Dr. Barnes, in which Dr. Clarke had his hands in the water during a convulsions, that the convulsions and by no means to name the fact of Richard Lawrence, at which it was very uncertain and known not whether he could have got to the White House, when they are not frequent, and if these occur during your convulsions, they will not affect the uterus, nor do they impede any convulsive movement. The Perpetual may be distinguished, from this excited by a greater number of them, because there is a more time, they are not preceded by terrors, and the person retains his consciousness, and more frequently the organs of sense are more sensible, and the child is generally born during one of these fits, whereas as in the other the uterus is not impeded. The Midlineal spasms often occur during convulsions, but may take place at any period before labour commences. They



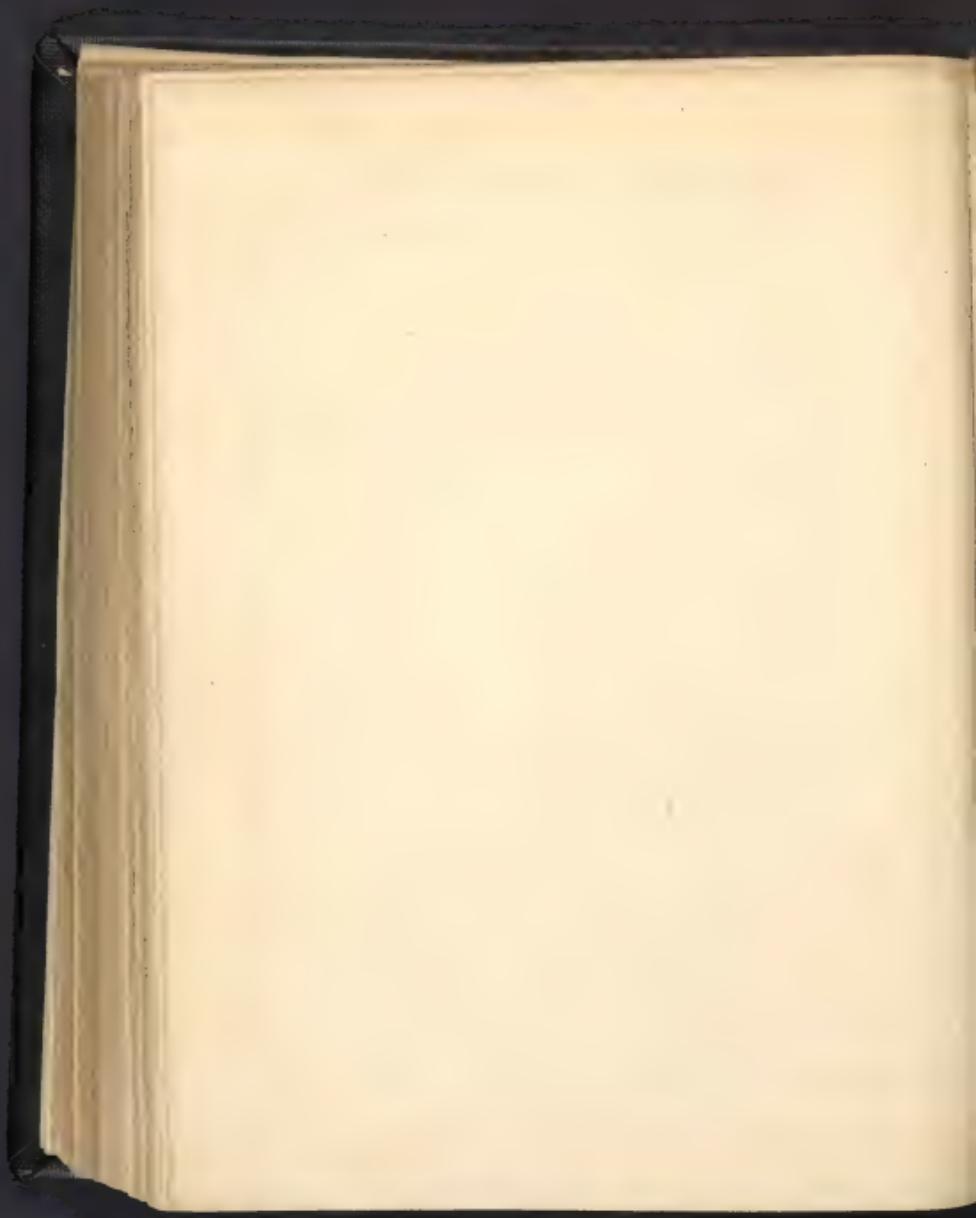
are preceded by most of the symptoms of the others, but they are not so violent; and, in addition to these, there is Glauco-  
stomous and "perpetual" in eyes as there are in the others  
and they wish for air. The motions of locomotion are  
most violent and the body is thrown into extreme  
excited form. The eyes do not roll so much in this  
as in the others, nor is the air so highly coloured.  
Respiration is not so hurried or difficult, and the  
pulse is not so much excited. The woman in con-  
tinuous labour will sometimes cover the head  
as in labour and during the attack will repeat  
of pain and cry alternately by these intervals the  
distress may easily be distinguished from the other dis-  
tress.

The Apoplectic species may be at any period of gestation, but is not so fully connected with labour. It is preceded by all the symptoms of Gravidia ex-  
cept the crying noise, but they are more violent,  
the attack comes on slower and is more violent.



Treatment. — The treatment of the Epileptic species consists for the most part in depletion, medicines, and they are to be carried to a moderate extent, so that the use of the lancet and the syringe, it is hoped will be rare in most cases. The first step should be rather called to a case of thickening to prevent injury of the tongue, by placing a piece of soft rags between the teeth. We then open a vein of a large size and as near the head as possible, hence the French vein is of most practical use. Some recommend opening the Temporal artery but a sufficient quantity of blood cannot be drawn from it soon enough, so that very soon after the French vein has been opened and it is still necessary to draw more blood, when necessary we are to apply Blister or lymphatic fomenta to the lower extremities, common or strong, for ten or fifteen minutes, and give a dose of laud or some other mild purgative, and make no small operations to the hands, and always open a vein of the arm with the lancet to sustain the action of the

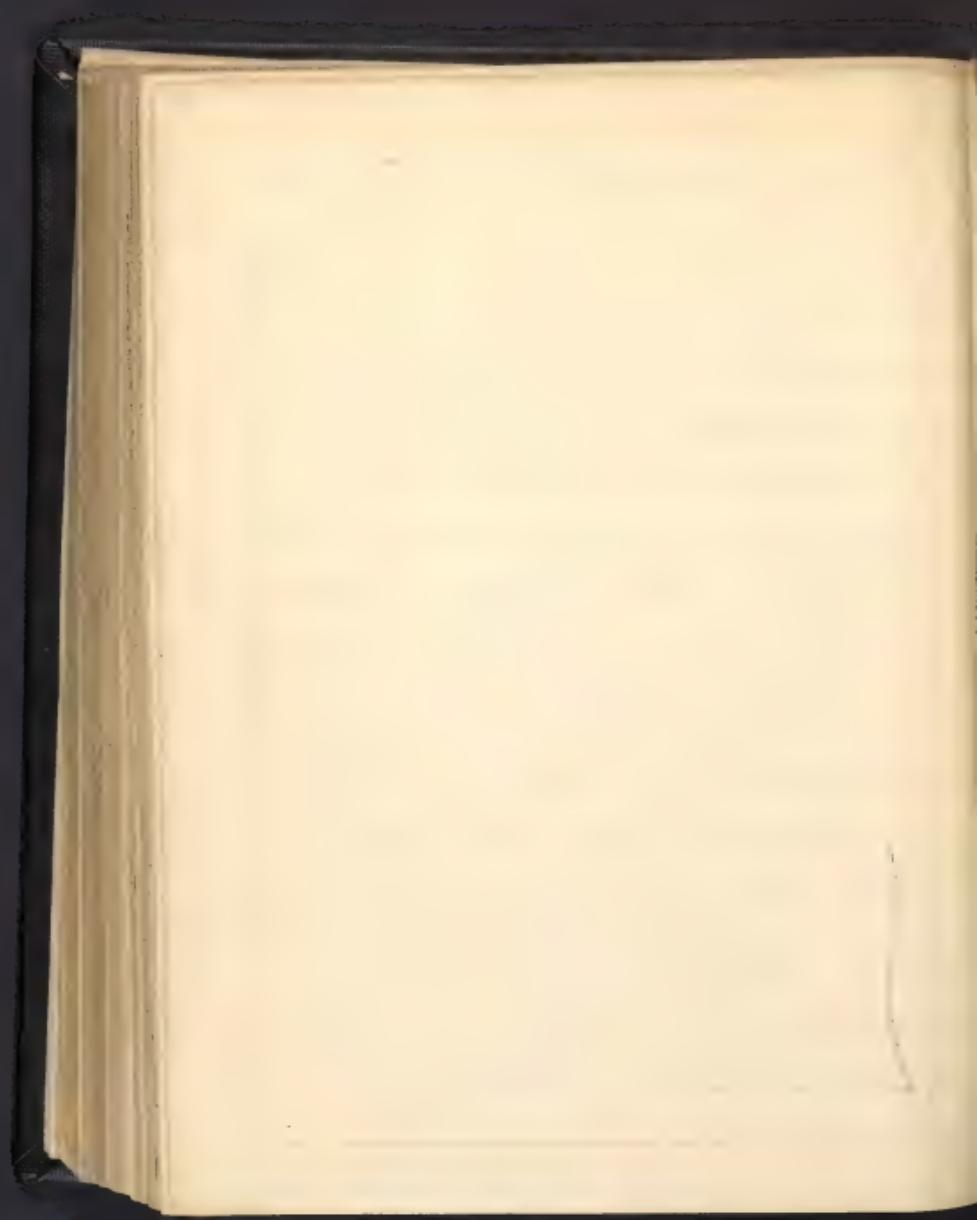
lungs, so that the air may circulate and the vessels to the heart may receive a current, in the same way the muscles will be the action of the heart.



With my communication for beginners of me find it  
desirable or valuable we are to introduce the term  
and action of the salts, but if it is wise and necessary.  
The following is to be repeated again and again  
until the word salt is a popular, it must be well  
under known that we are never just entering into  
any entrance into the remedy. It has been  
stated by some to administer Opium in such  
cases, but it is impudent. It may be used with  
safety in those cases when some other remedy  
now known, by supporting the strength can  
then bear more strongly recommended by Hamil-  
ton, but I have not seen the use of it mention-  
ed or presented by any writer on the subject.  
Whilst attending to the above mentioned it must  
not be remembered that the Bladder requires at-  
tention, and that it must be supplied at proper  
intervals, for common now have now protracted  
continuation of it alone. A libation, or an ad-



tract from The Monthly Medical Chirurgical Review) thinks that the chief obstacle to delivery consists in a spasmodic contraction of the neck and mouth of the uterus. To remedy this and relieve local plethora or congestion, he avails the use of the common depuratory measures, with Recurrency to the extramities, Com. mollients and Relaxant emollients and all proper endeavours to effect delivery, and with a view to relax the cervix and os uteri, he uses Belladonna in the form of Extract, made after the following formula.   
℞ 1oz Belladonna 3ij. Moisten it with a little water, and incorporate it by trituration with 13 Bee bees and a simple borate. This is to be applied directly to the mouth of the uterus by means of a small sponge rounded at its extremity, and having an aperture in the end large enough to admit the extremity of the little finger. The fingers having been drawn back, a small bit of the ointment is placed in the end of the sponge.

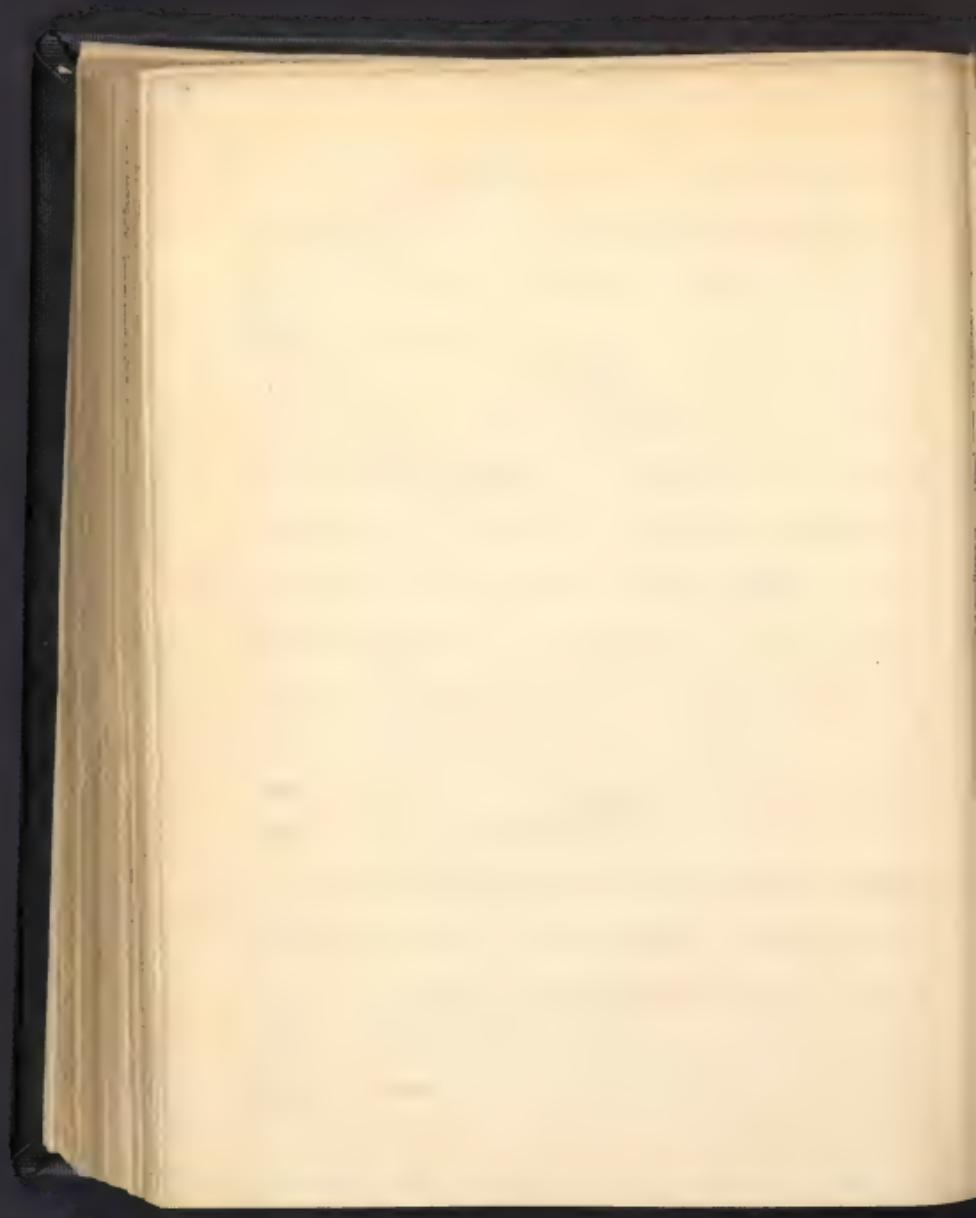


and by the direction of the fingers it is carried to the mouth of the uterus with which it is brought in contact. The uterus is generally dilated he says in about Thirty or Forty minutes, without impeding the action of the fundus or body. This method, it is said has been employed by him since 1811, and under his direction by Madame Le Chastelle, and Madame Legendre, and its use made public both in his lectures and in several Pharmaceutical works. However valuable this remedy may be in his opinions I imagine it is but little used in this country, I do not recollect for my part ever to have seen or heard it recommended, but I should think that his views as to the nature of the disease are in some cases at least, correct, and that from the known powers of Belladonna it would be likely to have the desired effect, at any rate I can not see that harm could result from the trial of it in cases where the Lancet had been used.



and the child is still contracted.

In the first species having either very convulsions with labour, or induced by antiseptics, or in Cephalic, Speculum & Retaining Instruments. The pulse being mostly full and tense, it is necessary to take away some blood before the administration of the above remedies in attack of this kind, may take place during labour, but it is extreme-  
ly rare; they arrest also all attack before la-  
bour comes on, and can mostly be relieved  
by the remedies mentioned. If, however,  
they do occur during labour, and do not  
yield to these, they may be affected by the  
usual means. The treatment of the  
Hypothalamic species is much the same as that of  
the Epileptics, except that the remedies must be ap-  
plied more promptly, and to a greater extent, most  
likely in this case, than in the other, for without this the  
patient will in all probability die. When, however,



we have the pleasure to see a patient conducted  
in safety through this terrifying disease, we are to  
inform upon her, Temperate living, Occasional  
Blood-letting, and an open state of bowel during  
each succeeding pregnancy, claiming to her at the  
same time, the probable consequence of neglecting  
the injunctions.

and a more rounded and more  
solid and more compact with almost solid  
compact granular surface and surface  
more smooth to touch with no fine granular  
or angular particles present even  
though some irregularities still exist

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